



State of Washington

DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE

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Main Office location: Natural Resources Building - 1111 Washington Street SE - Olympia, WA

DETERMINATION OF NONSIGNIFICANCE (DNS)

Name of Proposal: DNS 15-029: STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES FOR ELK
HOOF DISEASE LETHAL REMOVAL

Description of Proposal:

Sporadic reports of lame elk or elk with overgrown or missing hooves have been received in southwest Washington since the mid-1990s. This is a major concern for hunters, area residents and state wildlife managers alike. Reports of “hoof disease” have been increasing, and hunters have regularly seen and sometimes harvested elk with this condition. At times, observers have reported many individuals in a group limping and showing signs of hoof disease, which has been noted in males and females and old and very young animals.

Treponeme-associated hoof disease (TAHD) of elk results in abnormal hoof growth, cavitating sole ulcers, and in severe cases, eventual sloughing of the hoof capsule. All evidence to date indicates that the disease is caused by infectious treponeme bacteria and appears to be very similar to a disease complex known as digital dermatitis, the most common infectious hoof disease of cattle, and in some parts of the world, sheep. Working with specialists throughout the USA and abroad, this diagnosis is based on test results of diseased hooves examined by five independent diagnostic laboratories and reviewed by a 16-member technical panel of researchers and veterinarians. The primary area of infection is in the Cowlitz River Basin; however, suspected incidences of hoof disease occur in southwest Washington in ten counties and affects both the Mt. St. Helens and Willapa elk herds. It is likely that environmental factors are important in disease initiation and propagation as the bacteria are suspected to persist in wet soil conditions and spread to new areas on the hooves of infected animals. We currently do not know the prevalence of the disease, or its adverse effects on the population, and there is not a treatment plan or vaccine available at this time. Studies to examine the population level effects of TAHD on elk as well as the prevalence and distribution of the disease are currently underway.

With input from the Hoof Disease Technical Advisory Group (HDTAG) and the Hoof Disease Public Working Group (HDPWG), WDFW is proposing to lethally remove elk that are severely affected by TAHD for humane reasons. Reports of hoof diseased elk would be evaluated based on informed and predefined criteria for humane euthanasia. Each report of an elk would be assessed based on defined criteria including safety considerations, the condition of the elk, and location.

Proponent/Applicant: Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW)
Contact: Brooke George, Hoof Disease Coordinator
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Location of Proposal, including street, if any: Elk severely affected by hoof disease could potentially occur within Clark, Skamania, Cowlitz, Lewis, Thurston, Wahkiakum, Pacific, Grays Harbor, Mason, and Pierce Counties in Washington. Elk

that meet the criteria for euthanasia would likely occur within rural/urban interface environments.

Lead Agency: Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW)

WDFW has determined that this proposal will likely not have a significant adverse impact on the environment. Therefore, state law¹ does not require an environmental impact statement (EIS). WDFW made this determination of nonsignificance (DNS) after we reviewed the environmental checklist and other information on file with us.

We issued this DNS according to state rules.² We will **not act on this proposal for 14 days** from the date we issued the DNS. Agencies, affected tribes, and members of the public are invited to comment on this proposal or DNS. We must receive your comments within 14 days of the date of this letter. The comment period will end at **5:00 pm on May 19, 2015.**

Method of Comment: The following procedures shall govern the method to comment on agency SEPA proposals. Comments received through these procedures are part of the official SEPA record for this proposal.

You can submit your comments any one of the following ways:

- Email to SEPAdesk2@dfw.wa.gov
- Online at the WDFW SEPA website comment link at: <http://wdfw.wa.gov/licensing/sepa/>
- Fax to (360) 902-2946;
- Mail to the address below.

Responsible Official: Lisa Wood

Position/Title: SEPA/NEPA Coordinator, WDFW Regulatory Services Section

Address: 600 Capitol Way North, Olympia, WA 98501-1091

After the comment period closes, applicants may view the updated status of this proposal on the WDFW SEPA website: <http://wdfw.wa.gov/licensing/sepa/>. Once the status is posted as final, applicants and permittees may take action on the proposal. When a proposal is modified or withdrawn, notice will be given in accordance with state law.¹

If you have questions about this DNS or the details of the proposal, contact Lisa Wood at the address, e-mail, or fax number above; you can also call her at (360) 902-2260.

DATE OF ISSUE: May 5, 2015

SIGNATURE:



Footnotes

1. RCW 43.21C.030(2)(c)
2. WAC 197-11-340(2).

SEPA Log Number: 15-029.dns